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Managing Vandalism

Managing Vandalism

A Guide to Reducing Damage in
Parks and Recreation Facilities

Parks and Recreation Commission
Public Facilities Commission

Kevin H. White, *Mayor*
City of Boston

May 1978

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The Project Team acknowledges the earlier work on school vandalism sponsored by the Public Facilities Department of the City of Boston, John Zeisel's *Stopping School Property Damage* (1976). Zeisel's pioneer work focused on the social dynamics of property damage as it relates to the design and administration of public schools. This guide and the school vandalism book are complementary pieces in an area of inquiry where much useful research waits to be done.

The Project Team wishes to thank the Parks and Recreation Department for its cooperation, particularly Peter G. Meade, former Commissioner; John F. Ruck, Executive Secretary; Gerard J. Horgan, Assistant Commissioner; Frank W. Clark, Chief Engineer; Dorothy M. Curran, Director of Recreation; Robert J. Shea, General Superintendent; Mark P. Cullinan, Special Assistant to the Commissioner.

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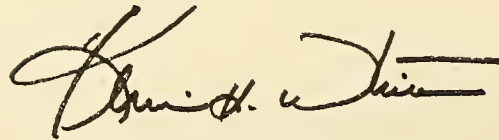
The abuse of public recreation facilities is a national phenomenon. The City of Boston has been concerned about the problem for a number of years; and it here acknowledges a debt of gratitude to the National Science Foundation for a grant to explore ways of reducing damage in our parks and playgrounds.

A product of the study is this guide for parks managers. Not only will it be of value to our own Parks and Recreation Department, but we also look forward to sharing it with others who are struggling to maintain the amenity of recreational resources in a time of constricted budgets and changing community needs.

The guide is an unusual document. It is an instance of one city, with federal support, attempting to lend its insights to sister cities around the country. What it presents are common sense approaches, recognizing that public officials above all need *practical* help rather than academic research if they are to improve municipal performance.

We offer the guide in the hope that it may become a model for the exchange of urban experience. It is my personal belief that America's cities have much more to give one another than we have suspected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Kevin H. White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kevin H. White
Mayor
City of Boston

Foreword

This guide is the result of a research project carried out in the parks and playgrounds of the City of Boston. The project, sponsored by the National Science Foundation, studied a number of specific sites over the course of a year. In its research the project team talked to dozens of people, including Parks Department staff, police officials, community leaders, families who live near recreation facilities, and users themselves, especially young people. The authors have tried to translate the insights gained from this research into a form useful to the parks and recreation professionals around the country. Their reaction to the guide will be the measure of its success.



Introduction: Damage vs. Vandalism

The purpose of this guide is a simple one. It is intended to help managers develop better ways to curb damage to parks and recreation facilities. In order to do that it stresses three things:

understanding the problem

reviewing management tools available to deal with it, and

devising a conscious strategy for putting those tools to work

Is it worth investing time and energy in such a program? Each manager must decide for himself or herself on the basis of local experience. Nevertheless, it is clear from a national perspective that damage — beyond inevitable wear and tear — has been very costly for countless parks and recreation agencies. It has been costly not only in dollars spent on maintenance, repair and replacement, but also in terms of lowered staff morale and, perhaps most important of all, in facilities which have been made less attractive to the public.

Even the most imaginative strategy will not eliminate the problem. However, damage can be reduced, and the manager has at his disposal the means to reduce it.

At this point you may wonder why we are stressing “damage” rather than “vandalism.” There are good reasons for making a distinction. In fact, the distinction represents the beginning of a conscious strategy. To put it simply, vandalism is an emotion-laden word. It suggests vivid images of wanton, irrational, destructive behavior. The word itself can make people angry or provoke feelings of hopelessness.

Without doubt there are a number of very hostile individuals in our society who do wreck and burn for reasons few of us understand. But they represent a small part of the story. There is incidental damage as well as wanton damage. Some damage can be caused by poor design. Other damage may result from frustration because a parks department itself is perceived as uncaring. We will discuss these causes in more detail, but the point to be noted here is that we need to free ourselves from automatic reactions to a particularly powerful term. “Damage” is a much more neutral word: it helps us to analyze before we react.

There is another reason for thinking in terms of damage rather than vandalism. Vandalism is a concept that leads to questions of motivation, family life and peer group pres-

tures. While these are all areas in need of exploration, parks and recreation agencies are not equipped for such a job.

Damage, on the other hand, falls within the normal sphere of responsibility of parks departments. It is something departments have the means to handle, and the concept suggests an approach that can help them handle it better: improved management. Management, simply defined, means marshalling resources to achieve objectives. What resources do managers have available to them? Actually quite a few, despite the fact that all of them may be limited in one way or another.

It is not the objective of this guide to provide a catalogue of available tools, techniques and solutions; the aim, rather, is to suggest approaches which will help individual departments take the offensive. To all of the suggestions presented in the following pages a manager might say, "Yes, I know that. That's just common sense." We hope all of them are common sense. But that's not the point. What managers ideally should be asking themselves is: "How many of the tools available to me am I actually using?"

The guide is presented in two sections:

Section I goes into the management approach and examines some of the key tools available to managers.

Section II deals more specifically with some of the most common situations in which damage takes place in recreation facilities. This section is divided into two parts. The first part addresses damage situations in parks, playgrounds and open spaces. The second part does the same for pools, gyms, recreation centers and other buildings.

Managing Damage

Re-thinking the Problem

Many ways of responding to the problem of “vandalism” are not only ineffective, they may even make the problem worse. Let’s examine some of them to see why. They might be said to fall into two categories: the single-answer response and the non-response. Even departments with sophisticated strategies have sometimes been surprised, when talking to their own field staffs, at the extent to which individual line people fall into one of these two camps.

It might be well worth a manager’s time to ask a few department employees what they think about the problem known as vandalism. Following are the kinds of remarks a manager is most likely to hear:

“What we need is more security — guards, police dogs, an electronic surveillance system.”

This may be the most common of the single-answer solutions. A defensive reaction, it implies an “us-them” relationship in which the adversary is probably more a product of fantasy than fact. The security approach is certainly not wrong in itself, but it is unlikely to justify its usually high cost.

“The police and courts aren’t doing their job. They’ve got to catch some of these people and make examples of them.”

This is a punitive attitude and should be categorized as a non-response. Why? First, because police have generally not had great success in dealing with the problems that concern us here, nor have judges shown themselves willing to treat “nuisance” complaints as serious crimes. But there is a more important point. The punitive attitude implies that there’s nothing a parks department can do about the problem. It’s up to somebody else. This amounts to giving up; it is the very opposite of the approach an aggressive manager should try to develop.

“We’ve got to come up with a vandal-proof design for our next recreation building (swimming pool, tot-lot, etc.).”

The speaker will not want to hear you say, “There is no vandal-proof design,” but that is probably what he needs to be told in order to get on with the development of a workable strategy. Of course design is important. A great deal of apparently vandal-caused damage may well be the result of poor design. But when it becomes a single-answer solution, it encourages a department to neglect all the other possible means of coping with the problem.

“We’ve tried everything. Guess there’s not much else to do but keep replacing things as they get destroyed.”

This is the true fatalist speaking, and he falls at once into the single-answer category. Not only is this response a sure way to sap a department’s morale, it will also pour the maintenance budget down a bottomless hole. In many cases prompt repair may be the correct response, but only when a situation has been thoroughly reviewed can a sensible decision be made regarding replacement.

“They did it. Well, they’ll just have to live with it like that.”

If the speaker sounds vindictive, it isn’t hard to understand why. Public servants who do their best to provide attractive facilities can become very embittered when their work is destroyed time after time. Such an experience can lead to this ultimate non-response: “Let them live with it. I’m through.” The problem is that this response punishes responsible users far more than it does the abusers. In fact, such an attitude on the part of a department may turn formerly responsible users into abusers — those who have decided that the department itself “just doesn’t give a damn.”

Let’s pause at this point for a review. We’ve been talking about responses to the phenomenon called vandalism. We’ve noted several varieties, including the defensive, the punitive, the vindictive, the fatalistic, the technological. There are more, but, taken together, all of them tend to fall into the categories of the single-answer or the non-response. While a single-answer response shows more initiative than a non-response, both of them fall short of the ideal.

What would a better approach entail? Basically three elements:

- understanding the problem**
- reviewing available tools**
- devising a strategy**

Management Information

In order to function, all managerial systems must have information. While many other factors go into good management, it may be stated simply that good management is impossible without adequate information.

Let us take it as a given that a whole body of information is beyond the reach of most departments. They will never, for all practical purposes, find out why such and such a person willfully destroyed a building or snapped off a young tree or broke a dozen windows in one evening. It is pertinent information but it is unavailable. Perhaps only slightly more available is information about the social attitudes of young people who would rather drink beer in the middle of the night in a playground than use it for sports during the day. We would like to know, but as managers we probably never will know in any useful way.

What then can we find out that could be considered accurate and useful information? In other words, what kind of information can be gathered by departmental staff? Three kinds are worth looking at in constructing an anti-damage strategy. They are:

condition reports

damage reports

case analyses

At this point some managers may be saying to themselves that collecting this information would involve too much extra work for the department. In fact, much of the information exists in one form or another. The point is not to create an elaborate reporting system for its own sake, but rather to get information to the manager in a form he can use.



whether parks, playgrounds and other facilities are clean, whether they are in need of major renovation or minor fix-up, and whether they are heavily used or not used much at all.

Usually this information is obtained in three ways. The first is through informal observation, usually at the supervisory level. The second is by formal inspection at the managerial level. And the third is in the form of requests for repairs or replacement.

In smaller departments, inspection and perhaps even written requests for repairs may be unnecessary. Active managers of smaller departments may well have reliable status reports in their heads. This makes their job easier in some ways than that of the larger department manager, who may not have seen some of his or her facilities recently and who cannot visit them often enough to have a sense of their condition.

Consequently, at least in larger systems, some combination of written repair requests and periodic formal inspections is necessary if adequate information on the status of facilities is to be assembled and maintained. Why is this so necessary? For several reasons:

- This information, when properly used, gives a department one measure of its adequacy as a provider of services.
- It can help to reveal areas of chronic neglect and may suggest the need for a general review of recreation and maintenance performance.
- Condition assessments — through a process of compiling and comparing repair requests and inspection reports — can help to identify patterns of damage which might otherwise go unnoticed by management.

Condition Reports

Now, let's talk about the three kinds of information in order. First of all, a department should have a sense of the condition of its entire inventory of facilities. This information should be constantly updated, because management should be constantly asking itself where it stands as a provider of services to the public. Extensive data is not necessary, and unless a department has a sophisticated information analysis capacity, numbers may even get in the way. Management needs to know, on a continuing basis,

how extensive it was, and what, if anything, is known about why it occurred. A park-keeper need not be asked to determine whether damage is vandalism or not. Such an effort may simply confuse the matter. The manager's need is not — at least at first — to ascertain the spirit in which damage was done, but to learn where and what the damage was.

Reports can be made in conjunction with requests for repair or through a separate reporting system (preferably a combined system to reduce paperwork). Whichever mode is adopted, the reports must be timely and at a level of detail no greater than the capacity of management to digest them. It will be of no help to a manager to receive great bundles of 25-item damage report forms, prepared in triplicate, which the manager cannot readily refine into useful pictures of what is actually happening in a particular park or playground.

This is an important warning: information which is not or cannot be used might as well not be collected. However, with adequate means to utilize it at the management level, an incident reporting system can be of considerable value. Here are some of the reasons:

- By encouraging park-keepers and supervisors to notice damage, the system can counteract the tendency of employees to overlook it or to accept it as inevitable.
- It can help spot the build-up of minor damage that otherwise might not come to management's attention until it reaches "catastrophic" proportions.
- In conjunction with requests for repair, it can provide the raw data needed to establish the costs of damage, both system-wide and for individual facilities.

Damage Reports

Three kinds of information were suggested as part of an overall information system. The first was information about the condition of all the sites and facilities in a system. The second is information about instances of damage. A fairly elementary damage reporting system can be valuable, as long as it is actually used. It might convey no more than the bare essentials: where damage occurred,

Case Analysis

If information on condition is the first element of an information system and incident reporting a second, a third might be an exercise called case analysis. It is quite different from the other two elements. It will probably be undertaken on an occasional rather than routine basis. It will probably be used selectively rather than throughout a park system. And it will require a degree of personal involvement at a fairly high managerial level. In fact, it will require the manager to play detective.

What are we talking about? What is case analysis?

In short, it is an attempt, calling on all available sources of information, to understand the park or playground or recreation building as an environment in which the parks department itself is only one of many participants. It will therefore require managers to think about their department's role in a way quite different from its usual "house-keeping" capacity.

Especially in a larger department, a comprehensive view may be necessary to make sense of routinely gathered information. To put it another way, condition and damage reports may indicate that a problem is building up, but a manager may need more information than such reports supply in order to understand what is going on. For example, a manager knows from condition reports that one of his recreation buildings is in fair-to-poor shape. Weekly damage reports tell him that incidents of apparent vandalism are frequent. What the reports will not reveal is a serious personality conflict between a recreation supervisor and the teen-agers who use the building, or that the building's original design was inappropriate, or that inferior materials were used.

It may then be time for a major reassessment of the situation which would include a review of the recent history of the park. It would include, perhaps, a staff discussion of information supplied by accumulated condition and incident reports. In addition, it would involve visits to the site as well as interviews with maintenance and recreation staff, families whose property abuts the facility, community leaders, and users.

Visits to the site can provide important information about the causes of damage. For example, graffiti, worn foot paths, beer cans and cigarette butts, and tire tracks may provide helpful clues to the problem. These clues will not provide the entire picture, but they will lead to hunches

which a manager can then check by talking to users and others familiar with the facility.

Interviews with users, neighbors, staff, and others can help to fill in missing pieces of the picture. It is important to talk to people from each of these groups. As in the fable of the blind men and the elephant, each may have only part of the picture. The manager's job is to gain an overview by putting the parts together. A parks manager should try to find out:

Who uses the facility? Identify age and ethnic groups, formal and informal groups. The acting out of conflicts between users may result in damage to the facility. One group may dominate the facility to the exclusion of others, causing "bad blood."

How is a facility used? It is important to know how people actually use a facility rather than how they are "supposed to" use it. Equipment is often damaged because it is employed in unintended ways, as for instance when several teenagers bounce on a merry-go-round designed for small children. Damage also takes place when people make changes in a facility to suit their use of it. One example would be a hole cut in a fence to create a shortcut.

How did the damage occur? Damage has many causes, not just maliciousness. It may be accidental, due to unintended use, or it may be due to changes made by people to suit their needs. Since the damage resulting from these different causes may be very similar, a manager should resist jumping to conclusions.

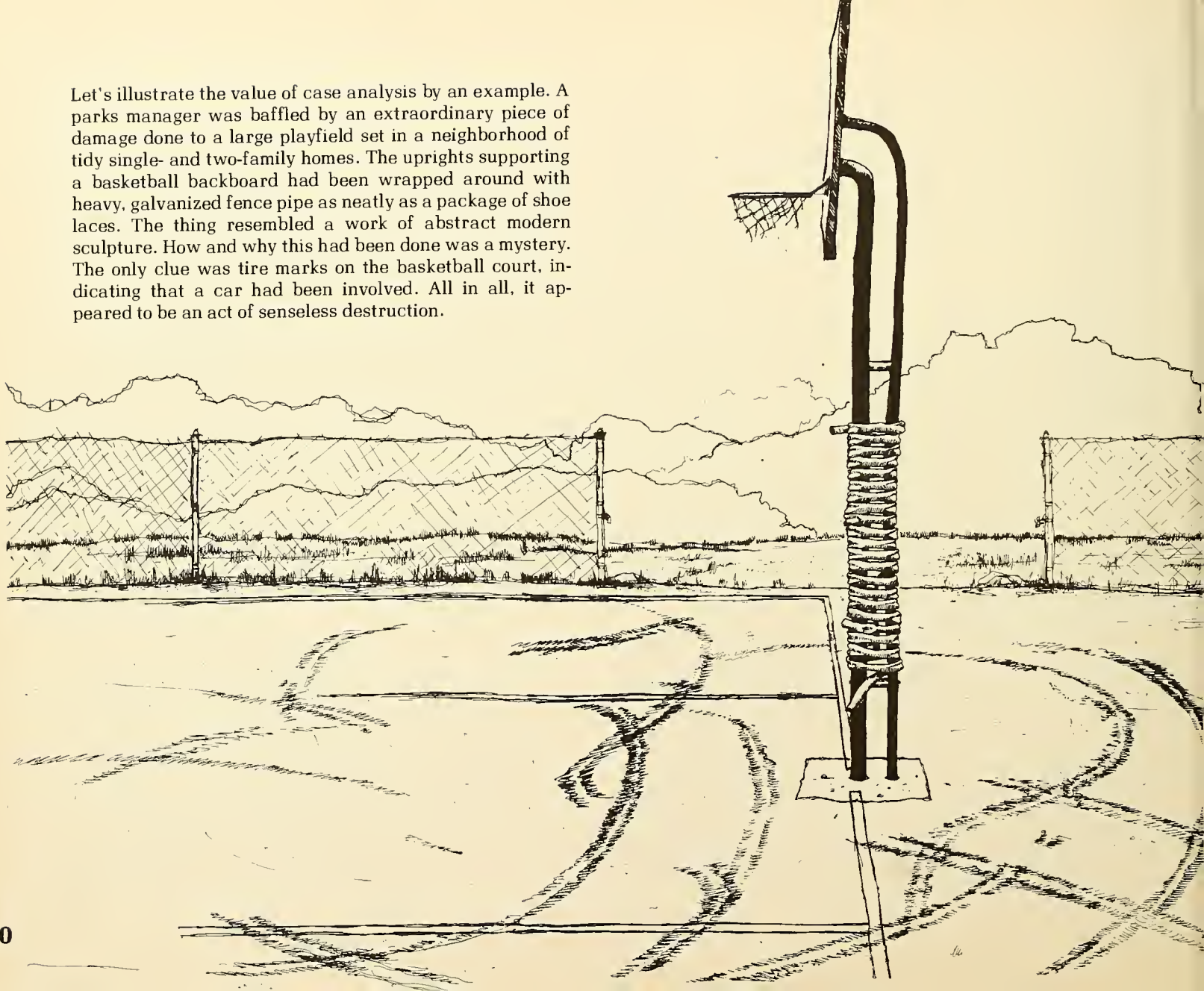
When did the damage occur? It is important to establish the sequence of events: what happened first, what if anything did the parks department do about it in response, and what resulted? Without an understanding of the sequence a parks manager may get a distorted view of the problem. Large-scale destruction may appear to be sudden when it

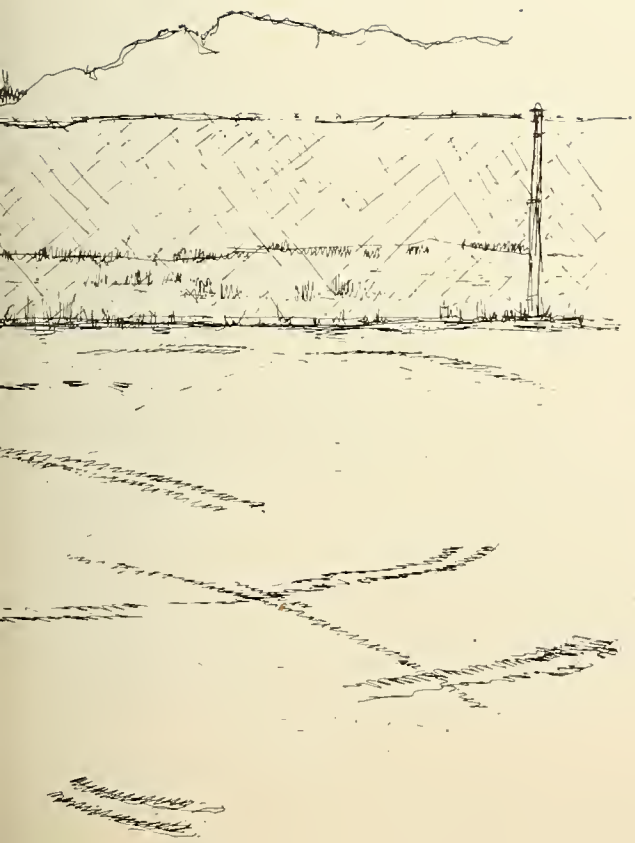
is actually the end result of damage which accumulated over time. A burned-out field house may look like the result of a single act of vandalism when in fact it is the last of a series of incidents which started with a broken window.

Who was involved in the damage? The mysterious "they" responsible for damage could be an individual, a group, or the majority of users. In fact, a parks department may itself have contributed to the damage by failing to respond or by responding in the wrong way.

How do users and neighbors feel about the facility? Users and neighbors who have a sense of "investment" in a facility are more likely to help care for it. If they feel it does not meet their needs, their frustration may indirectly contribute to the problem.

Let's illustrate the value of case analysis by an example. A parks manager was baffled by an extraordinary piece of damage done to a large playfield set in a neighborhood of tidy single- and two-family homes. The uprights supporting a basketball backboard had been wrapped around with heavy, galvanized fence pipe as neatly as a package of shoe laces. The thing resembled a work of abstract modern sculpture. How and why this had been done was a mystery. The only clue was tire marks on the basketball court, indicating that a car had been involved. All in all, it appeared to be an act of senseless destruction.





However, the parks manager was able to piece together the story from interviews with young people who hang out at the field, neighbors, and park maintenance staff. The damage occurred over a period of two years, beginning with older teenagers who drove "hot boxes" (stolen cars) onto the field and battered the fence around the basketball court.

In a second and separate stage of damage, young children used the bent cyclone fence as a trampoline, bouncing up and down on it until the pipes finally snapped off. They didn't see what they had done as damage because the fences were already bent.

Months later, in yet a third stage, a group of youths in their middle teens who gather at night near the basketball court took the fallen supports and wound them around the back-board uprights. In order to do this a smaller piece of pipe was inserted in the end of the fence support for leverage. They described it as "just something to do." As they saw it, the damage had already been done, and they hadn't hurt anything, since they could still use the basketball court. The parks department installed barriers to keep cars off the field, but in the meantime the group of older teenagers who had done the original damage had grown up and moved away.

The story shows several things: that a variety of people may be involved in an act of "vandalism;" that it may happen over time; and that it is not necessarily malicious in nature. If parks management had had better information at any point in the sequence of events, it might have been able to respond more effectively and interrupt the cycle of damage.

Management Tools

At the beginning we noted three elements of an effective damage reduction program. These were:

understanding the problem
reviewing management tools to deal with it, and
devising a conscious strategy to put those
tools to work

We have already talked about the first element: obtaining adequate information. It is now time to review the tools available. As a beginning, it will be worthwhile for managers to ask themselves whether their departments have ever systematically considered the range of tools available for dealing with damage. This exercise by itself amounts to a test of a department's awareness of the problem. If a department has not thought a great deal about available tools and how to use them, it is not alone. Parks managers frequently overlook possible resources, or take the ones they do use for granted. Although we cannot cover all of them, we will consider:

planning and design
maintenance and repair
staffing and supervision
scheduling and programs
community relations

We have suggested throughout this guide that raising a department's level of self-awareness may be one of the most effective techniques management can use in a campaign against avoidable damage. To translate that into practical terms where design is concerned, a manager might put into practice, or at least experiment with, a design review process specifically aimed at anticipating damage. In all too many cases the design of parks, playgrounds, recreation facilities, and equipment is left to design professionals or to suppliers. They have their obvious and important role, but they seldom see the results of their work once it is put to use. Valuable feedback is thus lost, and it is only the manager who has the power to see that the insights of field staff and park users are translated into improved design.

How might a manager handle a design review process? One of the best ways is to call upon a variety of people who have the chance to see how facilities and equipment are used — and abused — over time. Such people include park-keepers, maintenance personnel, neighborhood residents, and users, particularly young people. What we are recommending here is something a bit different from the formal “citizen participation” models that have at times led to frustration and disappointing results.

Community “leaders” are not always the best source of information about what role a park or playground or other recreational facility plays in a community, how it is used and misused on a daily basis, and how its vulnerabilities might be reduced. An alternative or at least a supplement to the advice of traditional spokesmen might be informal groups invited to discuss ways of avoiding past mistakes and anticipating future problems.

Managers should not be put off by the idea of elaborate committee structures. They aren't necessary. Including a few maintenance and recreation people in a design review

Planning & Design

Park managers make planning decisions more often than they realize. They make them when purchasing new equipment, authorizing repairs, renovating old facilities, and commissioning designs for new ones. In many cases the problem of damage is not taken into consideration as these decisions are made. No amount of careful planning or design can eliminate damage entirely, but if it is taken into account, the impact of damage can certainly be reduced.



session and asking departmental staff to bring along a few users and neighbors can produce an extraordinary amount of information. A secondary benefit worth mentioning is the increased sense of participation, on the part of both department employees and community people, that such a process can foster. Managers who become completely wrapped up in "managing" are sometimes surprised by the good effect of opening the decision process to those who are closest to recreational facilities and services.

Such informal consultations should be open-ended. This is the best way to gain insights that a manager might not otherwise get. But some structure is also needed. A design review process might be built around a set of basic questions, including:

Are the facilities in question going to serve a real need? Do enough people really want them in their present or projected form? Concrete chess tables, landscaped sitting areas, elaborate play equipment complexes may all look fine in an "artist's conception," but if they are not appropriate to the situation, they may just be targets for future damage.

Does the facility provide for a broad range of potential users? Although there are exceptions, as a general rule damage will be less a problem in a facility that serves a variety of people and thus is widely perceived as a benefit.

Will the facilities or equipment survive unintended uses? Nothing is more to the point as a manager thinks about the problem of damage than the fact that many individuals do not use parks and playgrounds the way the designer intended them to. Every wall should be thought of as a potential graffiti tablet, every basketball hoop as a chin-up bar, every child's swing as a

seat for a burly adolescent.

Has ease of maintenance and repair been taken into account? Facilities which are hard to clean and equipment which may require difficult to obtain replacement parts are that much more prone to neglect and damage. Given the amount of unintended use, misuse and outright abuse that takes place in parks today, managers can help themselves by seeking "playground level" advice on how to make things simple, how to make them sturdy, and how to increase their chances of survival without sacrificing their appeal.

As a final note on the role of planning and design in a damage reduction program, the projection of operating costs should be stressed. Total operating cost projections will include staffing of recreation buildings and pools as well as estimates of replacement, repair, and routine maintenance needed to keep a facility in acceptable condition. These projections are not easy to do, nor can they be done with 100% accuracy by even the most sophisticated department. But managers should not be discouraged from making an attempt, at least at an elementary level. We all know how quickly the bright new playground or recreation building can turn into a liability if it is not kept up. More than that, a facility which is overly expensive to maintain can strain an entire system, increasing the risk of damage elsewhere.

Maintenance & Repair

The importance of adequate levels of maintenance and repair cannot be over-estimated. Persistent litter, unresolved damage, neglect in mowing, pruning, painting and so on are a statement to many different people that the department "doesn't give a damn." From the manager's side, that reading may be grossly unfair. He is apt to see himself and his department caught in the squeeze of excessive demands and abuse of facilities on one hand and inadequate resources on the other. But the very fact that damage so disrupts routine operations and saps budgets argues all the more strongly for timely maintenance and repair.

Why? Because apparent neglect and deterioration become a downward spiral. When facilities are unsightly or difficult to use, responsible users begin to shun them. Others, especially young people, may substitute destructive play for more conventional kinds of recreation as a facility deteriorates. (How many kids break windows in derelict structures because that's what they seem to be for?) And finally, serious abusers are apt to exert an ever more negative influence on facilities which appear to have been abandoned.

We can identify three types of maintenance: routine, preventive and adaptive. While each type may be done by the same maintenance staff, it is helpful to consider them separately. Routine maintenance includes those things which must be done on a regular basis such as grass cutting, field preparation, clean up and re-painting equipment. Routine maintenance in particular gives a clear signal about how much the department cares about a park or recreation building. Perhaps without knowing it, park users often take their cues on how to treat a facility from the way a parks department maintains it.

Preventive maintenance is simply catching damage as it starts. This means regular inspection of facilities for such things as fasteners which are beginning to come apart and materials which are weakening from use or overuse. For example loose bolts on swings or slides, cracked bench slats, and door closers which need adjustment. Attending to such minor items while they are still relatively simple to repair can prevent more serious and costly damage.

Adaptive maintenance means making repairs in such a way as to avoid recurring damage. One way is to upgrade the materials used, replacing bench slats with heavier, thicker wood or putting sturdier hardware on doors and play equipment. Some other forms of adaptive maintenance could include putting protective screens or covers on vul-

nerable items, moving equipment to locations where it is less likely to be damaged and in some cases, particularly if equipment serves no apparent need, removing it altogether.

It should be noted here that some materials may make a facility so unattractive that users will avoid it. An example would be replacing ordinary porcelain toilets with cast metal toilets without seats. This will make them more durable but people may choose not to use them. Also simply "hardening" a facility by installing heavier locks for example, may only increase the challenge to abusers. When this happens, a manager will want to look for solutions other than repair or replacement.

Anyone presenting this sort of a guide shouldn't pretend that a manager's job is an easy one. Simply telling him or her to do a first-class job of maintenance and repair is not enough. Some suggestions, therefore, are offered:

- Through a reporting system or first-hand observation, be alert to damage as it occurs. When damage is not noted and not promptly addressed, it can get out of hand.
- Make sure that the department has the capacity to respond to minor damage on an almost immediate basis. As an interim measure, encourage park-keepers to "tidy up" damage as much as possible. Better to remove a broken light globe at once than to leave it as an invitation for target practice on other globes.
- If necessary and possible, adjust clean-up schedules to coincide with periods of heaviest use and littering. It's better to have parks cleaned on Saturday evenings than to have large accumulations of rubbish which encourage Sunday users to think that the facility itself is the trash barrel.
- Develop a conscious replace/do-not-replace decision mechanism. If repair costs begin to exceed the value of an amenity (a purely local decision), it should be neatly removed. Try not to leave scars which suggest the department lost a battle to the "vandals."

Staffing & Supervision

While the quality, training and supervision of all personnel is of great concern to managers, we would like to focus here on a particular portion of a department's work force: the members of the recreation staff. These people can be especially helpful in reducing damage to pools, recreation centers and other major facilities. Serious damage, such as fires or the destruction of expensive mechanical equipment may mean the loss of hundreds of thousands of public dollars, but as we suggested earlier, these disasters often result from small but escalating amounts of damage beforehand.

Given the large investment and vulnerability of recreational facilities, where should a manager turn for protection? To design, obviously, both as buildings are planned and as they are renovated. Also to a balanced security program which a department must carefully weigh in terms of understood costs and benefits. But experience indicates that one of the best protections of all is an able, conscientious and well-supervised recreation staff. Such a staff may make the difference between having young people behave as responsible users or as abusers of a facility.

We are not telling managers to hire only outstanding individuals. Personnel is an area with many constraints for public-sector managers. Nevertheless, managerial skills can be used to get the most out of a recreation staff as a way of reducing damage. Staff members who are respected by users of a facility, who understand their jobs and do them, and who receive support and feedback on their performance can be part of the human dynamic that makes a major facility an asset rather than a target.

One of the first needs is well-defined job descriptions. It can easily happen that recreation personnel who are not provided with well thought-out job descriptions will slip into passive, custodial roles. A staff member is not doing a job if he or she simply shoots a few baskets with the kids. We won't provide a model job description here — that is a matter for each department — but job descriptions should be written, detailed, and periodically reassessed.

In so far as managers can control hiring, recreation staff should be selected on the basis of ability to establish rapport with a variety of potential users and the ability to exert authority and provide leadership. Rapport alone is not enough. Just "getting along" with people, especially kids, can lead to a lack of control, lessened respect for the facility itself, and a general attitude of "anything goes."

Supervision is needed if staff are to be an effective part of a damage reduction program. This means periodic on-site visits, program planning, evaluations of work performed and programs carried out. Such supervision, it should be noted, can help fairly ordinary people accomplish what only extraordinary recreation leaders can accomplish without supervision.

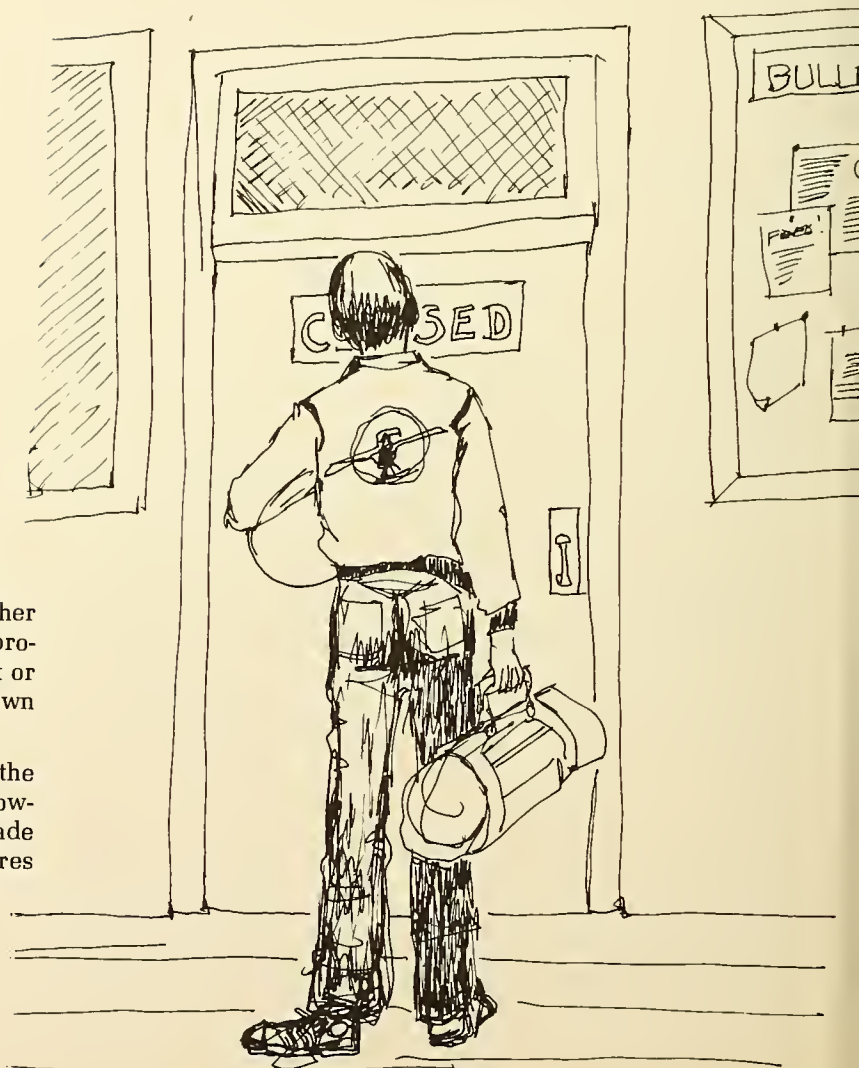
Initial orientation plus periodic training can help make recreation personnel a force for reducing damage. Orientation should provide background knowledge about the facility and should inform new personnel about the neighborhood, stressing likely tensions and trouble spots. Periodic training sessions might deal with subjects such as program planning, proper use of equipment, and leadership techniques. Such an education program need not be elaborate to be beneficial. Even a modest program is important, if for no other reason than that it shows the concern of management for its staff's success on the job.

A final note concerns incentives and discipline. Management may have limited ability to reward outstanding performance, or even to punish inadequate work. However, assignments should be treated very cautiously as a way of rewarding and punishing recreation staff. If a reward consists of being transferred to a "better" facility, one with less stress and so on, and punishment consists of just the reverse, the department may find itself increasing the risk to facilities in more problem-prone areas.

Scheduling & Programs

The management of schedules and programs is another way a department can present itself as a responsible provider of services. If it is widely perceived as indifferent or unresponsive, a department may be implicated in its own damage problem.

Ideally, schedules should be tailored to the needs of the majority of users of recreation facilities. In practice, however, this is rarely possible. Trade-offs have to be made between the constraints on the department and the desires of its clientele.



In any case, the hours of availability finally decided upon should be rigorously adhered to. Recreation centers that are open sporadically, pools that are closed when they are supposed to be open, and floodlights which are off when the softball teams arrive to play all cause frustration that may be taken out on the facilities themselves.

Managers should not underestimate the consequences of haphazard observance of schedules. If you take a bus or train to work, think what unannounced cancellations do to your frame of mind. Think how you would react if the bank decided to shut half an hour early on Friday afternoon. Because managers are not in day-to-day contact with the users of recreation facilities, they must make an effort to keep in mind predictable human reactions to unpredictable behavior. It is easy but dangerous to let the problems of the department (an employee out sick, a misplaced key for an electrical box, etc.) instead of the needs of the public determine the supply of services.

In the area of programming, there are different philosophies. Some departments believe that programming should keep people busy all the time. Others take a more relaxed approach and include supervised idle time, recognizing that young people in particular have a need just to "hang around." There is no right or wrong philosophy of recreational programming; success alone is the measure. But there are some general principles to be observed if programming is to help the cause of damage reduction. Here are some of them:

- As a general rule, damage problems seem to be more severe when a single group, most often teenagers, dominates a facility and discourages others from using it. Where possible, programs should be designed to attract users whose ages differ considerably. A wide variety of people should feel that a playground or pool is "theirs" to use and enjoy; no one group should be encouraged to see it as "theirs" in a hostile, exclusionary sense.
- Damage is often the result of idleness and boredom. Supervised "hanging around" can conceivably be worked into an overall recreation center program, but where programs themselves are spotty or non-existent, a recreation center is in increased danger.
- A simple but well-understood code of conduct is necessary to successful programming, which is, in turn, an element of damage control. Departments should see to it that interested and responsible users are not driven away by others who are chronically disruptive or destructive. There has to be a degree of healthy give and take, but indulgence of habitual offenders or surrender to them will not mean less damage. Instead, it will probably mean more.

Community Relations

Public relations and community relations are quite different. Each has its legitimate role. Public relations — like television — sends out a positive message about an organization or product. Community relations, which is more like the telephone, seeks a dialogue. And a dialogue with its clientele can help parks and recreation management cut down the damage problem.

Neighborhood people and users who are frustrated, hostile, and fed up with the appearance or performance of a recreation facility can make its problems worse. They can ignore damage as they see it occurring; they can cease to use a facility and thus abandon it to chronic abusers;

and they can criticize it in a way that gives tacit permission to their own children to vandalize. But sympathetic, active users and neighbors can diminish a facility's problems. They can become a department's eyes and ears, they can alert the police, they can exert personal pressure on abusers, and they can do minor repair and maintenance unasked. The same users and neighbors can behave in either of these ways.

Informing people of a department's programs and special events is a part of good community relations. So is explaining the closing of facilities. But the term "community relations" also implies that parks management not only distributes information but takes it in as well. For example, procedures are needed for receiving and responding to complaints and requests. And, as noted earlier, when a park is to be constructed or renovated, users and neighbors can be profitably involved in the planning and design process. Dialogue is not always successful, but when a department does not think in terms of communication with the people it serves, the risk of misunderstanding, alienation and thus damage can only go up.

Talking to users and community people can also help a department discover — and this is much worth noting — how many potential allies it has. Among people who use a park or playground for recreation, there are always a few who will be happy to share in its upkeep, if they think their efforts are appreciated. But unless a department establishes a way to communicate with its public, it will never be able to find and cultivate these allies.

We won't suggest who should do the community relations work or precisely what form it should take. Such a function will vary a great deal according to the circumstances, resources and personalities of individual departments. The important thing is that there be an institutionalized way for a department to talk to and listen to the people it serves.

Common Damage Situations & Some Responses

In the first section of this guide we talked about the elements of an overall management approach to damage. In this section we will review a number of common situations in which damage takes place. After describing each situation we will offer several responses which represent options available to parks managers.

The first part of this section deals with what might be called "open" facilities: parks, playgrounds, tot-lots and so on. The second part addresses "enclosed" facilities such as indoor pools, recreation centers and the like. Experience suggests that these types of facilities should be treated separately because of the differences they represent in terms of potential damage costs, degree of control over their use, and differences in the importance of staffing.

We are therefore going to divide the world into "open" and "enclosed" facilities and then, for each, try to categorize types of damage and offer some possible responses.

Parks & Playgrounds

Damage to Equipment

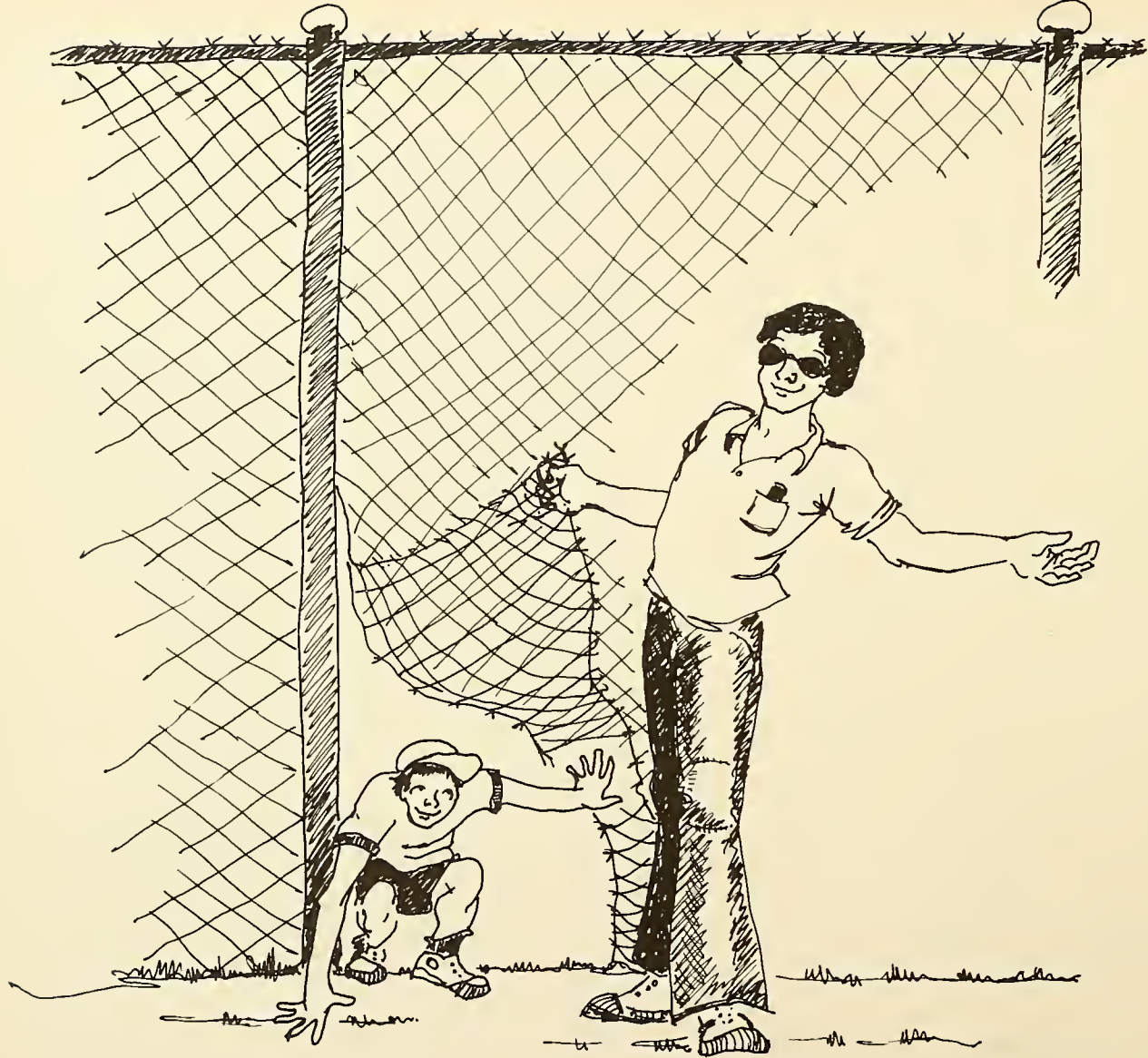
Of the many reasons for damage to equipment and facilities, four types can be identified:

The first is accident. An unprotected light fixture may be broken, for example, simply because it is too near a basketball court or baseball field.

A second cause is what we have called “unintended” use. This means that equipment is being employed for purposes other than those for which it was designed. People often sit or stand on low fences, trash containers, and children’s swings which are unable to support the weight. They sometimes climb on basketball stanchions and hoops, baseball backstops, light poles and goal posts. Children and teenagers will use the flat surfaces of tennis courts, basketball courts and hockey rinks for activities such as bike-riding, skate-boarding, pitch-and-hit baseball, stick games and street hockey.

The third cause of damage to park equipment is “modification,” which occurs when park users make changes in equipment to suit their needs. Children’s play often involves modification. For example, young children may detach a loose piece of equipment and make it part of the play house they are building. But modification is not just child’s play. Older users modify a facility when they cut a hole in a fence to create a “shortcut” from a parking lot to a baseball field.

A fourth reason for damage to park equipment is “challenge.” For instance, a youngster with a stone may test his marksmanship on a light fixture or steal a sign as a trophy for his bedroom wall. Children and teenagers in groups may “dare” each other to act in more destructive ways. Disabling high voltage electrical boxes is a case in point.



- Park users occasionally cut holes in fences around tennis and basketball courts in order to retrieve stray balls. Also, people may make holes in perimeter fences to create short-cuts. By eliminating fences where they are not needed and creating official openings where they are convenient to users, the parks department can reduce damage to fences.
- Children sometimes use bleachers for running, jumping and bouncing. Without sturdy materials and regular maintenance, planks will be broken and supports will be bent.
- Signs which can be reached from the ground are often stolen by people collecting trophies. When signboards are higher, damage and theft are less likely.
- Signs which are carved into wooden planks are harder to remove or deface than letters which are attached to a building or painted signs.
- Where electrical control boxes are in well-lighted, visible areas near streets and residences or inside secure buildings, costly damage may be avoided.
- In some parks, lighting control problems can be handled by providing responsible residents, league officers, or game officials with a key to the switch cabinet. This may prevent frustrated users from breaking it open.
- Large globe walkway lights are often an invitation to damage. When lights are placed on higher poles and reduced in size, people may feel less challenged to throw things at them.
- Since unintended use — teen-agers sitting on children's swings, for instance — is so common, play equipment should be designed to withstand a normal abuse level rather than a normal use level.
- Because damaged equipment is both dangerous and subject to yet further damage, prompt repair is important. Periodic inspection can help to assure that repairs are carried out in a timely manner.
- Equipment which can be repaired with commonly available materials and fittings is preferable to equipment requiring hard-to-get replacement parts.
- Much common maintenance and repair involving play equipment can be done without calling in skilled tradesmen if park workers are equipped with a few simple tools.
- Accessible bolts and screws invite people to try to unfasten them — all the more so when they become loose. Select equipment which presents minimum opportunities for tampering of this sort.
- Where possible, playing surfaces should be designed to withstand a variety of activities (skate-boarding on tennis courts, for instance).
- Pedestrian traffic patterns ought to be taken into account before walks are laid out or fences installed. Turf erosion may be reduced if planning allows for actual use.

Hanging Out

People of all ages — older people, parents with young children, and particularly teen-agers — use parks as meeting places. "Hanging out" is a predictable and understandable kind of behavior. A park or playground may be the only place where teen-agers can meet their friends without the restrictions of home or school. Young people socialize in parks for the same reasons that adults gather in clubs or lodge halls.

There are two kinds of hang-outs. When teen-agers want to meet their friends and find out "what's happening," they gather in "street corner" environments in parks and playgrounds. These areas are usually near streets so kids can see and be seen by their friends in passing cars. In such spots teen-agers will sit and listen to portable radios and drink beer. As a result, hang-out areas are often littered with bottles, cigarette butts and food wrappers. The backs of benches, fences and play equipment may be broken as they are used for seats.

A second kind of hang-out is less public. When teen-agers want to do things which would be forbidden in the open, they look for more secluded spots. These places are more isolated, perhaps behind buildings or in wooded areas. Like their public counterparts, these gathering places will also be littered and nearby equipment misused. Small fires may also be set for warmth or "for something to do." Teen-agers may come to regard both exposed and secluded hang-outs as their own "turf," much as adults regard the corner tavern as "theirs." Young people may signal this "ownership" by marking their names and so on where they can. In extreme cases they may assert exclusive control by making a tot-lot or playing area virtually unusable.

Hanging out seems to be a fact of life. Police attempts to break up groups of teen-agers usually meet with only tem-

porary success: the kids just come back after a few hours or days. In fact, these attempts may create resentment which is then taken out on the park or playground. The parks manager must decide whether it is best to try to stop this behavior or to assume that it is going to happen anyway and take measures to minimize the damage. Because hanging out is a common and persistent behavior, most of the following suggestions are directed at the second option.

- In designing parks and playgrounds, it should be recognized that certain features lend themselves to the establishment of hang-out areas. Placement of benches and other surfaces which can be used for sitting may help control the location of gathering places. This tactic might be used to channel adolescents away from tot-lots.
- Signs, light fixtures, shrubbery and other vulnerable items will sustain less damage if placed at a distance from known or anticipated hang-outs.
- Scheduling activities such as league games, concerts and other public events during evening hours will help to offset the presence of teen-agers and young adults. A variety of users may help to keep a park from gaining a reputation as a hang-out.
- When a department recognizes the existence of a traditional hang-out, it should consider not replacing repeatedly damaged equipment. Once a decision not to replace broken equipment has been made, prompt and neat removal of the debris will help to prevent the spread of damage.

- Trash barrels placed in traditional hang-outs may help to control the accumulation of litter. In some cases young people will throw refuse on the ground simply because there are no receptacles.
- Benches with backs designed to withstand the weight of several teen-agers or young adults

will be damaged less often. An alternative in hang-out areas might be benches without backs.

- Where the situation permits, departments might experiment with sitting places planned to be used as hang-outs and designed to confine litter to an easily cleaned area.





Littering

Eating and drinking in a park are part of enjoying it. Family picnics, beer at ball games, and lunches on park benches are all examples. In a clean park people tend to be a little more conscientious about putting litter in receptacles. However, when parks are not clean and trash containers are not convenient, food wrappers, bottles and cans tend to get dropped on the ground. An untidy park may say to users that littering is acceptable behavior. It may also tell them, however wrongly, that the department doesn't care.

Dog litter is another persistent problem. Many dog-owners feel it is their right to walk their animals in parks and playgrounds, and this creates problems for other users. Parks fouled by dogs are less attractive, and when fouling takes place in confined spaces such as tot-lots, some people may cease to use them altogether.

- Trash receptacles are often located where they are easiest for crews to pick up, but it may be less costly in the long run to place containers where people are most apt to discard litter.
- Easily recognized trash containers are more likely to be used than those which blend into the background. Engaging or humorous invitations to use receptacles are preferable to impersonal admonitions.
- Clean-up schedules which coincide with heaviest use can help to minimize prolonged periods when parks are littered. Also, at times of peak use, people may be encouraged to dispose of refuse properly if they see clean-up crews at work.
- Because children frequently smash bottles left behind by teen-agers and adults, the amount of dangerous broken glass in parks can be reduced by picking up bottles promptly.
- Since the contents of containers are set on fire from time to time, either accidentally or intentionally, consider using receptacles least likely to show the effects of fire.
- Trash barrels which are securely anchored are less likely to be upset by kids "fooling around," animals, or wind.

- When inspection shows that trash containers are frequently overflowing, it may be time to consider larger containers, more containers or more frequent collections.
- The burden on departmental personnel can be reduced by requesting sports teams and other organized groups who use the parks to clean up after themselves. Where permits are required, the department is in a good position to insist on co-operation.
- Small basket-type pole-mounted refuse containers may be inappropriate in areas used by children, who will often remove such containers for use as playthings.
- Two possibilities for reducing the problem of dog litter are: installing designated and frequently cleaned dog runs, and erecting fences to keep dogs from play areas for small children.



gang identifications. Sometimes they are markings made by children in order to adapt a park or playground to the informal games they play.

As far as a manager is concerned, graffiti may be more an annoyance than a serious problem. However, it tends to accumulate and, as it does, to drive out users who are offended by it or who feel the facility has become somebody else's turf. Graffiti may also be an invitation to more serious damage, since it seems to signal that abuse is now permitted.

Like hanging out, graffiti is a fact of life. No manager can realistically expect to eliminate it. However, it can be anticipated and thus to some extent controlled.

- Sometimes people's urge to express themselves can be directed to one large surface that can easily be repainted. This "community bulletin board" approach will probably work best if attention is not called to it.
- The use of materials with rough-textured dark-colored surfaces may discourage some graffiti; another choice is smooth hard surfaces which are easily cleaned. Stone or masonry surfaces are poor choices since they are both easy to mark and hard to clean.
- In some situations graffiti may be avoided by inviting a community art project to cover a large wall area with a mural.
- By observing strike zones, street hockey goals and other markings on walls, sidewalks, and parking lots, a department can learn how a facility is actually used and provide game lines that do not offend other users' sense of neatness.

Graffiti

Many people leave their mark in the form of graffiti on walls, rocks, trees, benches, rest rooms, and monuments. Such marks may be political messages, attempts at humor, or racial or ethnic slurs. More often they are personal, such as names and nicknames, or they are school, group, or

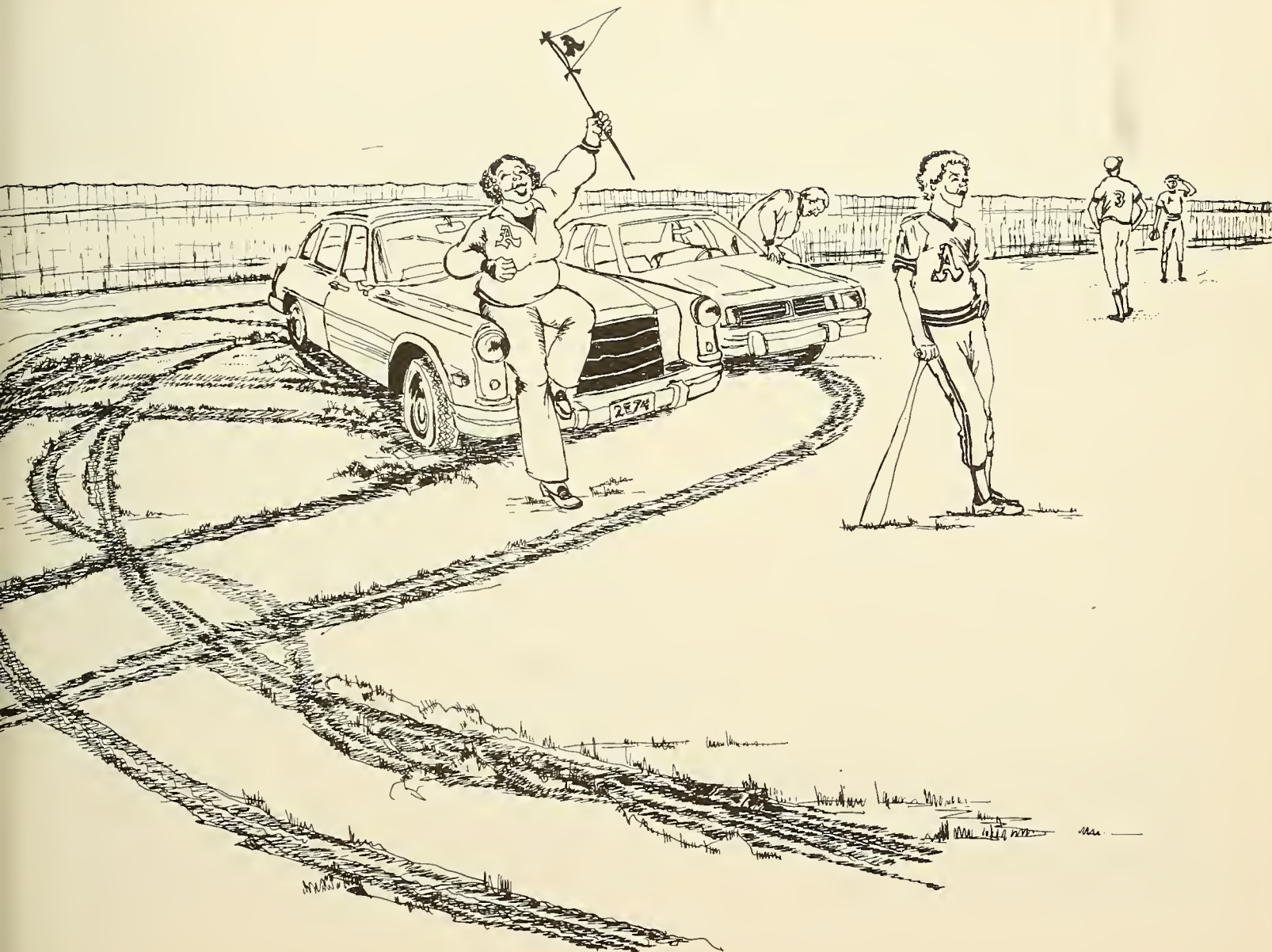
Vehicles

People drive their vehicles into parks for a number of reasons. They may drive their cars up to a field in order to have a comfortable place to sit and watch a ball game. They may use them to carry sports equipment onto the field. There may not be enough parking or the owner may want to keep his car in sight for security reasons. Teenagers may drive into parks to see if friends are there. Parks also provide an attractive terrain for motor bikes. Finally, parks may be convenient places to abandon stolen cars.

Whatever the reason, vehicles can cause damage, often accidental, to playing fields, grass, trees, lightpoles, fences and other equipment. Other damage results when drivers break gates, chains and locks to get their cars into parks.

A manager might simply like to designate areas as open or closed to vehicles, but this probably wouldn't be realistic. It is physically difficult to limit access in some sites. In others there is the problem of keeping private cars out while allowing parks equipment and emergency vehicles in. Habitual patterns of use may also be difficult to change. Therefore, in some cases a manager may want to accommodate vehicles; in others, to use tactics to limit or restrict them.

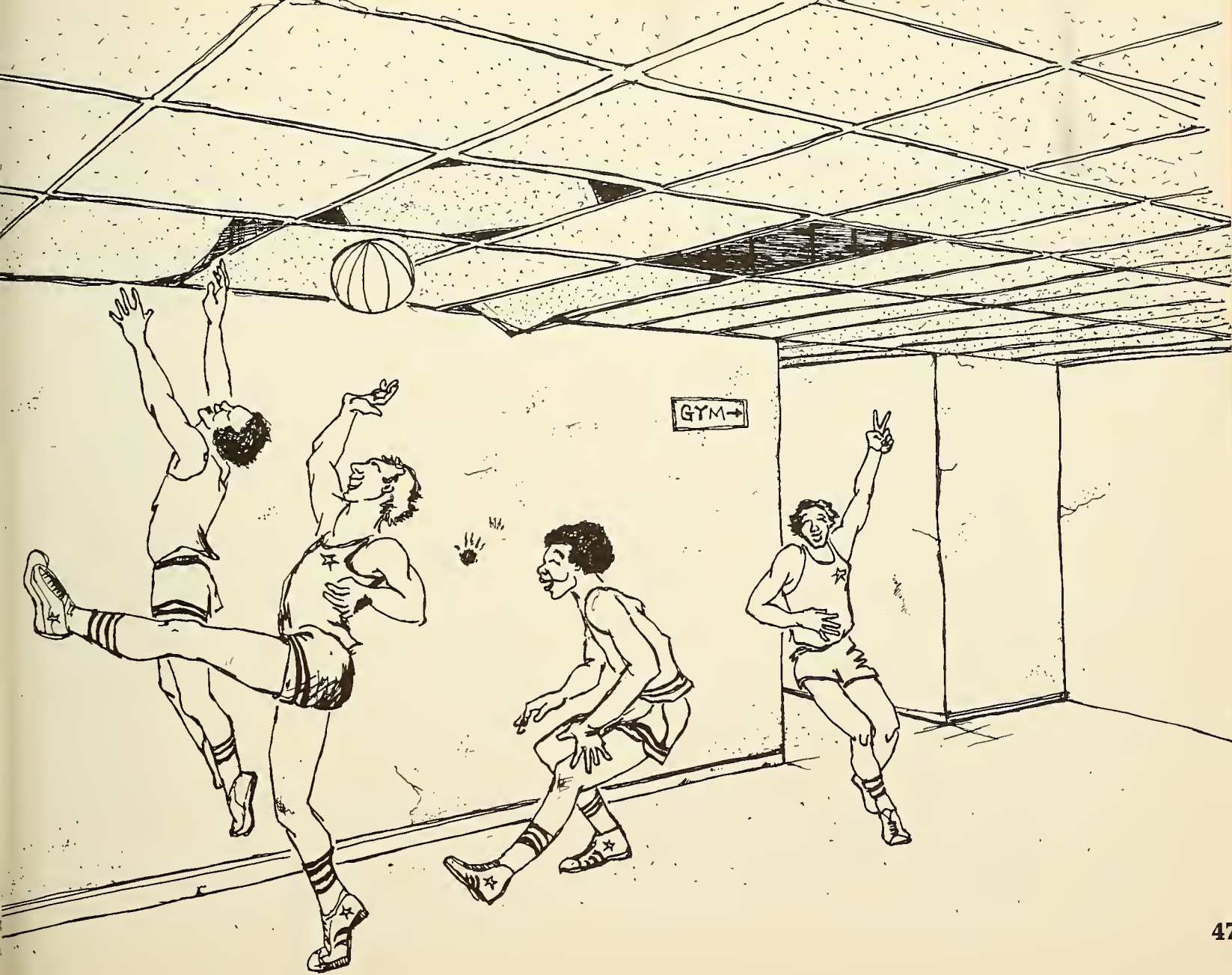
- If parks are designed with conveniently located parking areas, users will have less incentive to drive into them.
- Sturdy auto barriers of wood, steel or concrete, when used in combination with curbs, low walls or breaks in grade, may be more effective than barriers alone in blocking cars.
- Chain link fences which border parking areas may be bent or unravelled, often accidentally, by vehicle bumpers. Protecting fences with auto barriers will lessen this form of damage.
- The problem of cars in parks often accelerates: that is, once it starts there may be several incidents in rapid succession. Promptly installing or repairing damaged barriers, fences or gates can head off problems before they become serious.
- Especially in cases where they must obtain permits from the department, sports teams could be required to abide by vehicle regulations which prohibit cars on playing fields or in other designated areas.



Recreation Buildings

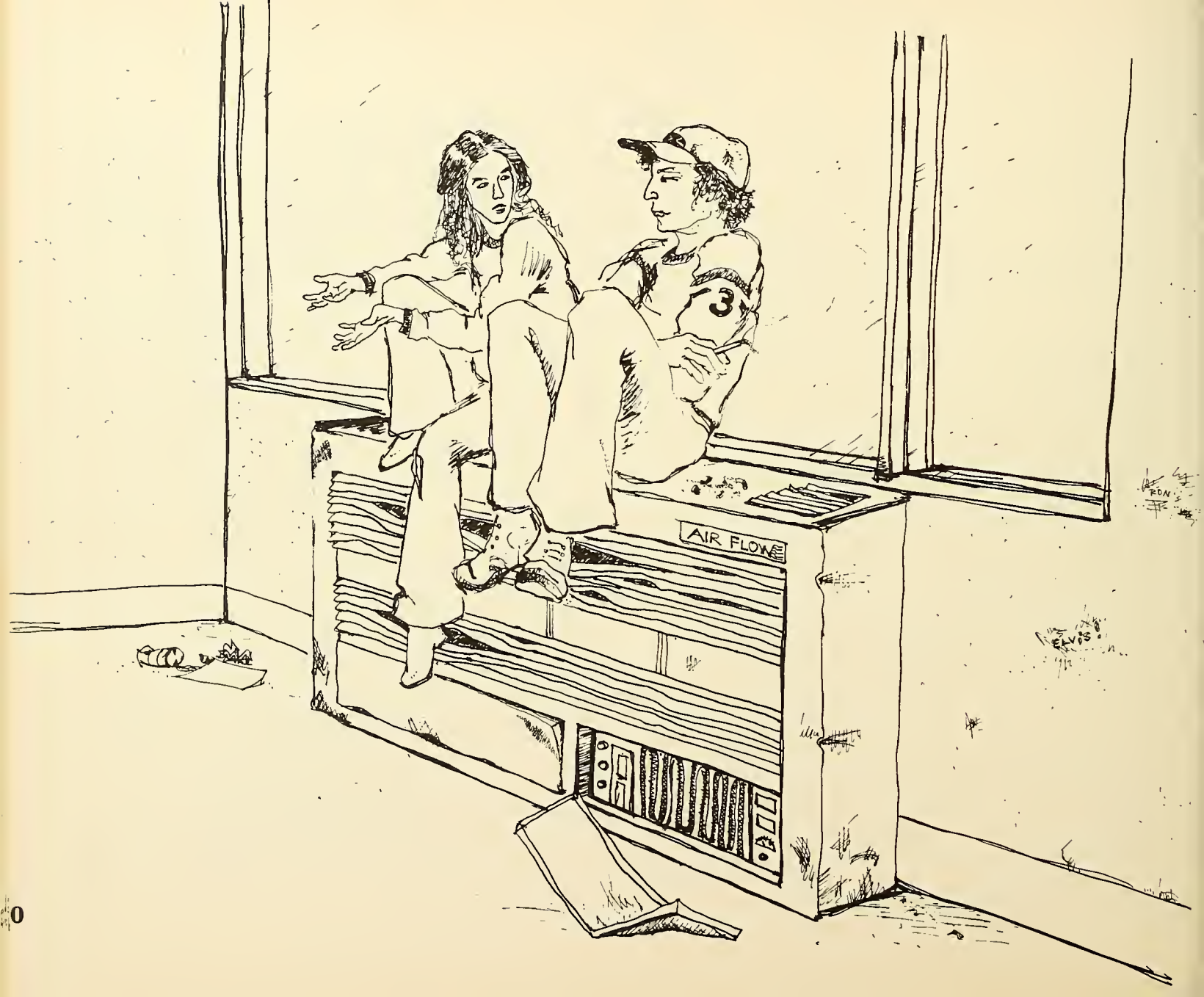
Damage to Equipment

Damage to equipment and facilities in recreation buildings occurs for reasons similar to those that cause damage to parks and playgrounds. First, damage may be accidental, as when an emergency light mounted behind a basketball backboard gets broken by a stray shot. Other damage results from the unintended use of equipment. As in parks, people sit or climb on equipment which was not designed to withstand such uses. For example, stall partitions in restrooms may become impromptu exercise equipment for swinging, climbing and doing chin-ups. Also people sit on convenient surfaces such as ventilators, window sills, counters and even trash containers and water fountains. The third common reason for damage is what we have called "challenge." Some building features just seem to invite damage. Hung ceilings are an example. A fourth reason for damage is the normal human desire to manipulate things. This often takes the form of "fooling around" with fixtures in buildings. People "fiddle" with such things as light switches, thermostats, signs and door hardware as much from curiosity and boredom as from malice.



Damage to buildings tends to spread. Once something is broken, even by ordinary wear and tear, it becomes vulnerable to accelerated damage because it is physically weakened and will be picked at. Of concern to management is a progression which may begin with a minor item and end in large-scale destruction.

- There must be enough recreation staff to provide adequate supervision. The minimum number of staff persons necessary for the orderly operation of a recreation center is determined as much by the layout of the building and the number of activities scheduled as by the number of users in the building.
- When rooms or activities are unsupervised, young people are more likely to engage in damage-producing activity. One recreation leader for each activity or room being used is desirable.
- Leadership programs for young people can help them to gain a sense of responsibility both for recreation activities and also for the care of buildings.
- Young people quickly learn what behavior is acceptable to the staff. If recreation leaders communicate to users that certain activities are not acceptable, and if they enforce those standards even-handedly, damage will generally be reduced.
- Recreation leaders and maintenance workers can assist designers by describing how people use recreation buildings and pointing out design features which commonly result in damage or maintenance problems.
- Because people tend to fool around with accessible fixtures and equipment, damage can be reduced if electrical, plumbing, and heating-cooling equipment is out of sight and out of reach.
- Sports equipment such as basketball hoops and ping pong tables should be designed, constructed, and installed to survive rough use or even common kinds of misuse.
- Teen-agers often jump to see if they can touch ceilings; avoid hung ceilings at a height where panels are likely to be displaced or broken.
- Thermostats, light switches, and security alarm controls subject to tampering should be placed in secure areas or protected by locking covers.
- Fire alarm boxes must be accessible in times of emergency, but they may be located in central areas where they can be supervised.
- Toilets and locker rooms are the scenes of considerable rough play, particularly when large numbers of youngsters change clothes before and after games. Careful design and selection of equipment, specifying such things as recessed plumbing, can reduce the potential for damage.
- Toilet partitions are very frequently damaged by people who climb, hang or swing on them. Solid masonry dividers are less likely to get this type of use.



Hanging Out

Young people hang out in and around recreation buildings much as they do in parks and playgrounds. When they want to be seen, they choose public places such as entrance ways, hallways, front steps, and other central points. When they want privacy, they will choose secluded spots such as rest rooms, stairwells, hidden corners, recessed doorways. People also hang out around recreation centers and pools before scheduled activities begin and after they have ended.

- If building designs do not include recessed entryways or isolated alcoves and stairwells, there will be fewer places for youths to gather unobserved.
- Young people gathering both outside and inside recreation buildings tend to sit or lean on equipment of convenient height. Damage can be avoided if fences, railings, window ledges, counters, trash containers and water fountains are designed to hold up under these uses.
- In gathering places such as hallways and lounges, furniture and other fixtures are subject to cigarette burns, chewing gum, spilled soft drinks, and doodling with felt tip pens. Durability of materials and ease of cleaning are particularly important in planning for these areas.
- In some cases it may be desirable to design an area specifically for informal gathering where damage to equipment can be minimized and graffiti easily dealt with.

Break-ins

Forced entry into recreation centers, pools, fieldhouses and other buildings is a serious problem for parks managers. Break-ins occur for a variety of reasons. Teen-agers enter buildings in order to hang out; they may feel they have no other place to go. Others will break in simply to swim or play basketball after the normal hours, particularly on evenings and weekends. Users who find a facility closed when it is supposed to be open may become frustrated and force their way in, feeling that it is their right to use it as scheduled. In this instance, damage to the buildings is often limited to a door lock or window broken to gain entry. But individuals or groups who feel they have been excluded by another group of users or mistreated by the staff may break in and wreck the building. Breaking-in may also be seen as a challenge or adventure, a teen-age version of children's "cops and robbers." Yet another reason is to steal money from cash boxes, vending machines, or snack bars or to take equipment which has resale value. (The problem of theft will be considered in the following section).

Common targets for break-ins include windows accessible from the ground, doors with glass or plastic panels, and roof doors and skylights which can be reached by climbing nearby trees or poles or by scaling walls. These are potential problems which may be avoided in the planning phase. Anticipating security problems through design or redesign of a building cannot completely prevent break-ins, but it can make them much more difficult.

Once a break-in occurs, a building becomes more vulnerable to further attempts. The physical signs of a first break-in suggest not only that it can be done but how to go about it. Damaged doors and windows which are repaired in a temporary or makeshift way are especially easy targets.

- If the hours of operation coincide as much as possible with the times young people want to use the buildings, particularly evenings, weekends and holidays, the incentive for breaking in may be reduced.
- Schedules of hours and programs should be clearly posted and carefully observed to avoid disappointing and angering users.
- If neighbors are given schedules of a recreation center's programs and asked to call police when they observe suspicious activity, they can become allies in a department's damage control campaign.
- Lighting around the sides of buildings may assist neighbors, passers-by, and police in keeping an eye on the building.
- Neighbors will be more likely to spot intruders around recreation buildings if the doors and windows are visible from nearby residences, stores and streets. Recessed entryways make a building architecturally more interesting but they shelter would-be intruders from public view.
- Windows accessible from the ground are easy targets for break-ins. Sealing them up or narrowing them so they are difficult to squeeze through will reduce the risk of break-ins.
- Exterior hardware on doors should be eliminated wherever possible.
- Panic hardware, closers, and locks on exterior doors need frequent adjustment or repair to prevent weaknesses which can be exploited by intruders.

- Trees, fences, and building fixtures can be seen as possible routes to upper-level windows or roofs.
- Skylights are particularly susceptible to break-ins. Where security is a problem, they should be avoided.
- Damage which occurs as a result of break-ins should be repaired to like-new condition as quickly as possible.

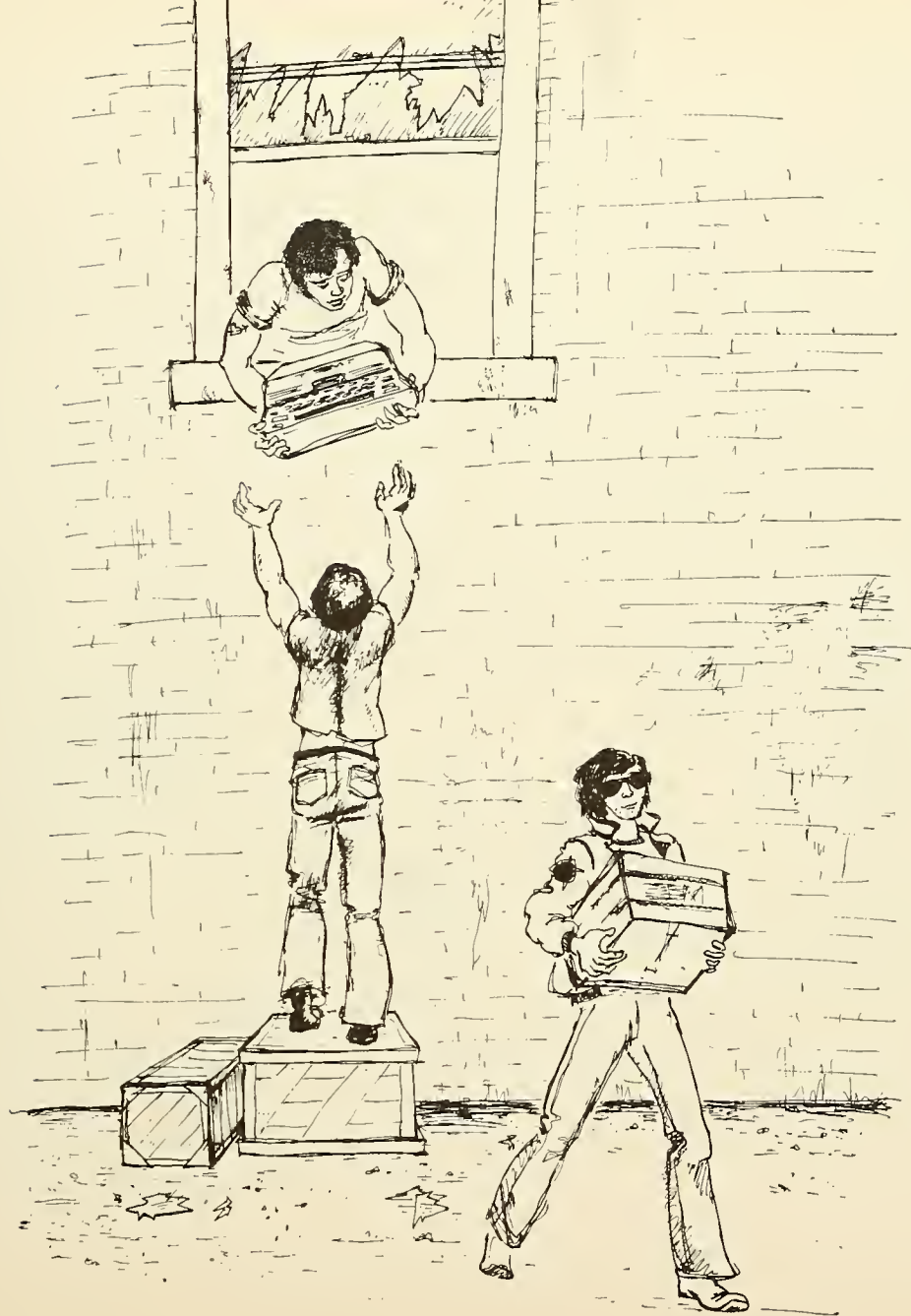
- Exterior doors with glass or plastic panels are susceptible to break-ins and are often damaged by normal rough use. Solid metal doors are preferable.
- When maintenance schedules are organized so that some of the regular clean-up work is done after closing hours, the presence of the custodians will discourage break-ins.



Theft

Why should theft be considered in this guide? Because break-ins which have theft as their motive may result in costly damage. Thefts may also hamper recreation programs and drive responsible users away. This in turn may rob a building of its intended purpose and contribute to boredom, frustration, and abuse. Frequent targets of theft include vending machines and pay telephones, maintenance and sports equipment, admission receipts and users' lockers. A manager's principle means of discouraging theft is to remove incentives and to plan for the security of the buildings.

- An incentive for theft can be reduced if there are no vending machines and if cash receipts (admission charges, pro shop and snack bar sales) are removed from the building every evening.
- Loss of sports equipment may be curtailed by requiring users to make a deposit of cash or a personal item of value when borrowing equipment.
- The possibility of theft may be diminished if recreation buildings are designed with a "secure" room for the storage of valuable items such as typewriters, projectors, audio equipment, athletic supplies and the staff's personal belongings. Ideally, the secure room would be inside an area which is itself off-limits.
- General alarm systems are often ineffective because they are easily foiled or damaged. It may be more effective to limit alarms to "secure" storage rooms, administrative offices, snack bars, pro shops, or other rooms where valuables are kept.
- Since it is difficult to control the circulation of keys, lock cylinders might be changed periodically to reduce the risk of copies falling into the wrong hands.
- People will more readily use a recreation facility if lockers or a reliable system for checking personal items is provided.





Damage to Closed Buildings

Parks departments find it necessary to close recreation buildings for a number of reasons. Budget cuts may necessitate closings in order to reduce staff, utility, and maintenance costs. Often facilities such as ice rinks and pools are shut down during off seasons. Older buildings may be taken out of use either because they no longer serve their original purposes or because their clientele has declined. Also, buildings may have to be closed temporarily because of malfunctions in their heating, plumbing, or electrical systems. But whatever the reason, property damage, break-ins, and theft increase dramatically when a building is closed to the public.

A chief reason for damage is that people see a closed building as belonging to no one, and they assume that nobody cares what happens to it. A facility's users may take the closing as a personal affront. They may imagine that other neighborhoods are being favored at their expense. Some members of the community will feel justified in venting their resentment on the building itself. Others will consider it their right to use the building, closed or not. Responsible citizens who might have taken steps to protect the open building from damage may now believe there is no point in getting involved.

Damage follows a regular pattern. As soon as the building is closed, break-ins begin, for the purpose of using the pool or gym, or hanging out in a secluded place out of the weather, or just for an "adventure." Once break-ins begin the facility becomes more vulnerable and equipment with

resale value is soon stolen. Plumbing, wiring and other salvageable materials are stripped. At this point small fires may occur, and soon "trashing" of the building takes place. Finally, there are major fires and water damage which may force the department to demolish the building.

A parks manager may have little choice about closing a building. But if a building is to be preserved for future use, a manager should consider whether, in view of the cost of damage and the risk of total loss, it would be better in the long run to keep the building in operation. It may be possible to find an alternative function for all or part of a building. Failing that, the structure should be made as secure as possible and the department should be ready to respond quickly to the first signs of damage. At the very least a manager ought to consider his options before closing a building.

- Before a closing, a manager might estimate the full cost of protection and repairing probable damage. It may be less expensive to keep the building open than to close it.
- In some cases buildings might be leased to "Y's," Boys' Clubs or local community groups capable of providing programs compatible with the goals of the department.
- Buildings may be kept occupied by locating administrative offices or maintenance activities in them until other program uses can be found.
- If the building is to be closed only temporarily, users will be less resentful if they are notified, through signs, media announcements and personal contacts, of the reason for the closing and the date when the facility will reopen.

Conclusion

The last two decades have been difficult ones for urban public recreation systems in the United States. The nation's parks and playgrounds are particularly vulnerable to contemporary stresses in American society. Caught between escalating costs, as well as increasing use and abuse of facilities on one hand, and straitened budgets on the other, parks managers may feel it is all they can do to hold their own.

It is reasonable, given the day-to-day reality managers must face, to encourage them to spend time and energy on

a special program to combat damage? Our answer is yes. The very problems managers face indicate that it is much in their self-interest to spend time on a damage reduction program. There is no magic bullet: help will not come from some technological break-through, or from the police and the courts, or from massive new federal aid. The best hope lies in the resources managers already have at their command.

This guide has stressed the need to reject common wisdom about "vandals" and "vandalism." There surely are individuals who carry out incomprehensible acts of destruction against recreation facilities, but they are not the whole story by any means. A more complete story will never emerge, however, until a department attempts to find out what is actually happening in its parks and playgrounds, who uses them and abuses them, and the role a department itself has played.

Simply by asking questions — about design, about user requirements and behavior, about neighborhood attitudes and departmental performance — a manager will learn more about how his or her facilities actually function and what a department can do to curb avoidable damage.

An idea central to this guide is that the development of a conscious strategy can be, in itself, a major step toward dealing with damage. Devising a conscious strategy means a better understanding of the problem. It also means reviewing the tools — some of which involve little or no cost — that a department has at its disposal.

There are no easy answers, but there are answers. Damage can be reduced. The best way may be to start small — for example by changing the design of a bench, altering the location of trash barrels, rescheduling the maintenance of a gym. Such modest experiments will help a department to prove to itself that it has some power to manage this most stubborn and discouraging problem.



